

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SP-02 PM-03 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 21807

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SREF, LA, TH

SUBJ: REPORTED ATTACK ON MEO REFUGEES BY PATHET LAO

REF: STATE 228053

FOLLOWING IS EXTRACT OF REPORT PREPARED BY AMCONSUL HARBIN IN
CHIANG MAI ON MEO REFUGEE CONDITIONS IN NAN PROVINCE:

BEGIN TEXT.

1. SUMMARYK CONSUL VISITED PUA AND MAE JARIM IN NAN PROVINCE
OCTOBER 8-9 AND FOUND NUMBER OF MEO REFUGEES FROM LAOS HAS NOW
INCREASED TO ABOUT 9,000 AT PUA BUT IS STABILIZING AT 5,000 IN
MAE JARIM. LATTER GROUP HAS LEFT ORIGINAL CAMP AT SOP TUAN AND
HAS SPLIT WITH 4,000 MOVING UP TO A BETTER AND MORE ACCESSIBLE
SITE NEARER MAE JARIM TOWN AND ANOTHER 1,000 GOING TO BAN KHWAENG.
WIDELY REPORTED DROWNING INCIDENT AT MAE JARIM INVOLVED FIVE
DEATHS, NOT "HUNDREDS," AND THERE WAS NO PATHET LAO ATTACK ON
CAMP. THOUGH SOME ARMED, UNIFORMED TROOPS APPEARED IN VICINITY.
END SUMMARY.

2. I VISITED NAN OCTOBER 8-9 WITH CONSULAR ASSISTANT (A NATIVE
OF NAN), FLEW OVER REFUGEE CAMPS AT PUA AND MAE JARIM SEVERAL
TIMES IN PORTER AIRCRAFT, AND DROVE INTO PUA AND MAE JARIM
DISTRICT TOWNS BY LAND ROVER. DURING COURSE OF VISIT WE INTER-
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VIEWED NUMEROUS PEOPLE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT REFUGEE AFFAIRS,

INCLUDING CHURCH OFFICIALS, MEO LEADERS, ORDINARY MEO FROM CAMPS ENCOUNTERED ALONG ROAD, RTG OFFICIALS, NURSES TREATING REFUGEES, THAI VILLAGERS IN VICINITY OF CAMPS, ETC. I DID NOT ACTUALLY "ENTER" CAMPS, BUT USE OF TERM PRESENTS SEMANTIC PROBLEM AT PUA SINCE CAMP LIES ASTRIDE MAIN HIGHWAY UP WHICH WE DROVE FROM NAN TO DISTRICT TOWN BEYOND CAMP.

3. AT MAE JARIM, ALL SOURCES CONTACTED (WITH SINGLE EXCEPTION NOTED IN PARA 9 BELOW) AGREE THAT FIVE MEO REFUGEES (NOT "SEVERAL HUNDRED" REPORTED IN REFTTEL) DROWNED WHILE CROSSING RIVER IN EARLY SEPTEMBER AND THAT MISHAP OCCURRED WHILE FIVE WERE ATTEMPTING TO REACH RICE DISTRIBUTION POINT AT MAE JARIM SUB-DISTRICT TOWN NOT "FLEEING PATHET LAO MORTAR ATTACK." INDEED, SOURCES AGREE THAT PATHET LAO HAVE NOT ATTACKED MEOS INSIDE THAILAND, BUT HAVE KILLED APPROXIMATELY TEN ATTEMPTING TO CROSS BORDER FROM LAOS.

4. FINALLY, SOURCES AGREE THAT ARMED, UNIFORMED PATHET LAO APPEARED IN VICINITY OF SOP TUAN REFUGEE CAMP (LOCATED TWENTY KILOMETERS INSIDE THAI BORDER). THERE IS, HOWEVER, DISAGREEMENT ABOUT HOW MANY PATHET LAO WERE SEEN AND WHAT THEIR MISSION WAS. THE MEO SAY THE PL TOLD THEM TO LEAVE THE AREA BECAUSE IT "BELONGED TO THE PL (SIC)." MAE JARIM SUB-DISTRICT CHIEF TOLD US PL WERE ON INTELLIGENCE MISSION SEEKING TO FIND OUT IF RTG PLANNED TO USE MEO AGAINST CT AND ALSO SOUNDING OUT MEO RE THEIR WILLINGNESS TO JOIN CT. (I'M INCLINED TOWARD LATTER INTERPRETATION OF PL MISSION, THOUGH SOP TUAN AREA HAS LONG BEEN REGARDED AS "CT TERRITORY" BY LOCAL POPULACE.) SUB-DISTRICT CHIEF SAID AREA CT UNITS ARE COMBINATION OF NORTH VIETNAMESE CADRE, PL, ETHNIC THAI AND MEO, THUS TERM "PATHET LAO" MAY HAVE IN FACT REFERRED TO LOCAL CT'S.

5. WHEN MEO FIRST ENTERED MAE JARIM SUB-DISTRICT THEY SETTLED AT BAN NAM LAN WHERE THERE WERE ONLY HANDFUL OF THAI VILLAGERS WHO COMPLAINED TO RTG AUTHORITIES ABOUT 5,000 MEO TRAMPLING THEIR CROPS. IN RESPONSE TO THESE COMPLAINTS RTG RESETTLED MEO IN SOP TUAN, CLOSER TO SUB-DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS. CHOICE OF SITE WAS UNFORTUNATE HOWEVER, AS IT WAS LOCATED ON NARROW RISE AT CONFLUENCE OF TWO UNBRIDGED STREAMS WHICH CAN BECOME RAGING TORRENTS AT THIS TIME OF YEAR. TO REACH RICE DISTRIBUTION POINT AT SUB-DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS (FOUR KILOMETERS AWAY) MEO HAD TO CROSS

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STREAM WHERE DROWNING INCIDENT OCCURRED DURING TYPHOON. FOLLOWING INCIDENT, MEO ABANDONED ORIGINAL SOP TUAN CAMP AND BULK OF REFUGEES MOVED TO HIGH RIDGE ACROSS STREAM AND CLOSER TO MAE JARIM TOWN. RTG OFFICIALS HAVE BUILT ROAD INTO THIS NEW CAMP WHICH IS NOW ACCESSIBLE BY VEHICLE. THAI VILLAGERS IN AREA OF MAE JARIM ARE NOT HAPPY TO HAVE MEO SO CLOSE, AND AUTHORITIES ARE ATTEMPTING TO CONFINE MEO TO NEW CAMP BY PLACING COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS IN SUB-DISTRICT TOWN TEMPORARILY "OFF-LIMITS" TO MEO.

6. WHEN OLD CAMP WAS ABANDONED SOME OF MEO HEADED FOR PUA CAMP AND ANOTHER GROUP OF 1,000 UNDER FORMER VANG PAO MAJOR PAOW LEE MUA SET UP APPARENTLY UNAUTHORIZED CAMP AT BAN KHWAENG. THIS LATTER CAMP (WHICH WAS VISITED AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY CONSULAR ASSISTANT) IS IN DEPLORABLE CONDITION AND APPEARS TO BE MUCH WORSE THAN EITHER PUA OR NEW SOP TUAN SITE. (LATTER ARE WELL LAID OUT CAMPS WITH TRADITIONAL LONG HOUSES COVERED BY THATCHED ROOFS AND WITH RAISED FLOORS.) REFUGEES LIVE IN SMALL SHELTERS COVERED BY PLASTIC SHEETING OR JUST LEAVES AND OFTEN SLEEP ON GROUND. CAMP LOCATED CLOSE TO NAN-MAE JARIM ROAD ALONG WHICH HUNDRED OF MEO FORAGE FOR FOOD AND WAIT FOR MEDICAL SUPPLIES WHICH THEY SAID UNHCR REP MOUCHET AND AMERICAN PRIEST, FATHER HARRY THEIL, HAD PROMISED TO DELIVER DIRECTLY TO THEM.

7. AT DISTRIBUTION POINT IN MAE JARIM TOWN RICE WAS BEING HANDED OUT TO MEO UNDER THEIR OWN SUPERVISION. SOME SALT AND SLEEPING MATS WERE ALSO IN STOCK BUT NOT BEING DISTRIBUTED AT TIME OF OUR VISIT. I WAS TOLD 99 REFUGEES HAVE DIED AT PUA THUS FAR AND 50-60 AT MAE JARIM (SUSPECT LATTER, AT LEAST, IS CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE). COLD WEATHER IS ALREADY SETTING IN AND REFUGEES WILL

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ACTION EA-06

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SOON NEED BLANKETS AS WELL AS FOOD AND MEDICINE. UNHCR REP MOUCHET WAS NOT IN PROVINCE DURING MY VISIT AND APPARENTLY IS STILL OCCUPIED WITH BUDGET PROBLEMS. HE HAS VISITED PUA AND MAE JARIM CAMPS ONCE EACH DURING THREE WEEKS SINCE HE ARRIVED IN NAN AND DISTRIBUTED RELIEF SUPPLIES (RICE AND MEDICINE).

8. PREDOMINANTLY MEO (THERE ARE ALSO YAO AND LAOTIAN) REFUGEES IN NAN NOW APPEAR TO BE DISTRIBUTED AS FOLLOWS: 9,000 AT PUA AND 5,000 AT MAE JARIM OF WHICH 4,000 ARE LOCATED AT NEW SOP TUAN CAMP AND 1,000 AT BAN KHWAENG. MEO MAJOR PAOW LEE MUA TOLD CONSULAR ASSISTANT 1,000 MEO HAD RETURNED TO LAOS FROM MAE JARIM BUT I'M INCLINED TO BELIEVE THEY MOVED UP TO PUA AS LATTER CAMP'S POPULATION HAS GROWN SUBSTANTIALLY IN PAST MONTH. MAE JARIM SUB-DISTRICT CHIEF TOLD US ANOTHER 10,000 MEO WERE WAITING ON LAOTIAN SIDE OF BORDER BUT PL HAD BLOCKED ENTRY INTO THAILAND.

9. WE RAN INTO FATHER HARRY THIEL AT HOTEL JUST BEFORE LEAVING NAN AND INFORMED HIM WE HAD PASSED GROUP ON ROAD TO MAE RIM THAT MORNING WHO SAID HE HAD INSTRUCTED THEM TO WAIT FOR HIM THAT DAY AT ROADSIDE. WE PROMISED THEM TO INFORM FATHER HARRY IF WE FOUND HIM IN NAN. THIEL SAID HE HAD JUST ARRIVED FROM CHIANG MAI AND WAS EN ROUTE SAME AFTERNOON TO PUA, NOT MAE JARIM. WHEN I ASKED HIM WHY MEO HAD MOVED OUT OF FORMER SOP TUAN CAMP HE SAID BECAUSE OF PATHET LAO ATTACK. HE REFUSED TO GO INTO DETAILS HOWEVER.

10. A. ON OVERALL SITUATION IN NAN CAMPS THEY CERTAINLY ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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NO CAMP PENDLETONS BUT THEY'RE NOT ANDERSONVILLES EITHER. THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES WE SAW FROM AIR, ON ROAD, AND DURING CONSULAR ASSISTANT'S VISIT TO BAN KHWAENG IN MAE JARIM APPEARED TO BE SURPRISINGLY HEALTHY AND ADAPTING TO HARDSHIP CONDITIONS WITH EQUANIMITY. AT SOP TUAN MEO APPEARED TO BE BUSY CONSTRUCTING HOUSES AND STAYING IN VICINITY OF CAMP WHEREAS NEARBY BAN KHWAENG SEEMED DESERTED FROM AIR BUT WE ENCOUNTERED HUNDREDS FROM THIS CAMP LAONG ROAD OFTEN CARRYING SQUASH AND PUMPKINS WITH WHICH THEY SAID THEY HAD BEEN PAID FOR WORK ON LOCAL FARMS. PUA RESIDENTS WERE NOT CONFINED TO CAMP BUT MOST OF THEM DIDN'T SEEM OBLIGED TO FORAGE FOR FOOD AS THEY EITHER IDLED ABOUT CAMP CHATTING AND EVEN PLAYING GAMES OR STROLLED AROUND BUSINESS AREA OF DISTRICT TOWN MAKING PURCHASES OR WINDOW-SHOPPING.

B. UNHCR PRINCE SADDRUDIN AGA KHAN'S VISIT CONFUSED PUA POPULACE WHO, WHEN TOLD PRINCE WAS COMING, ASSUMED IT WAS CROWN PINCE OF THAILAND AND PREPARED BANNERS AND PETITIONS ACCORDINGLY. APPEARANCE OF PRINCE APPARENTLY WAS A FIRST FOR PUA AND RESIDENTS WERE NON-PLUSSED BY EXPERIENCE.

C. THAI AUTHORITIES ARE GOING TO HAVE TO RESETTLE REFUGEES PERMANENTLY BEFORE LONG AND ARE CONSIDERING VARIOUS SITES IN NAN WHICH ARE AVAILABLE. LIKELIHOOD OF MEO RETURNING TO LAOS APPEARS NIL.
END TEXT.
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